

An International Perspective: The School as an Organization and Social Institution: Current Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present current challenges facing the school as an organization and social institution with respect to information technology. It is concluded the school ought to educate broadly when preparing students for the workplace because we can not accurately predict what their needs will be due to rapid advances in technology.

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Introduction

Schooling (whether it be primary, secondary or higher) usually occurs in classrooms (Husén, 1974, 3). Pupils or students are seated in these rooms where they actively listen to a man or woman who is referred to as a teacher. A great deal of effort is expended by the teacher in “maintaining discipline” in order to establish the necessary conditions for instruction (Husén, 1974, 22). All the learners are taught the same subjects, and are expected to progress at the same rate (Mercieca). No learning is deemed to take place without teaching. Formal education is compulsory in many countries, and young people stay in school beyond the mandatory age which prolongs their “childhood” (Husén, 1974, 9)¹.

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The school is in competition with a number of organizations in society with regard to distributing information: newspapers, radio, TV, video-cassettes and (more recently) the Internet (Husén, 1974, 19). Therefore, teachers are not the only sources of knowledge for learners which might, at times, diminish their credibility as information providers.

The teacher’s mission ought to include teaching students how to cope with the amount of information available to them, in other words, give them the ability to locate information, explain it and be responsible knowledge consumers (Husén, 1974, 23; Hallack, 2000, 33). Emphasis has to be placed on “learning how to learn?”

Because of rapid advances in technology, learning is now a lifelong process, so teachers must instill a liking for formal education during the period when it is mandatory (Husén, 1979, 153). They can do this, by making sure that learners are satisfied with their programs. Some 25% of all Canadian post-secondary school learners are now more than 24 years of age which suggests that Canadians recognize the need for lifelong learning. (<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/international/databanks/dossiers/mainfram.htm>).

A discussion of schooling would not be complete without mentioning the Virtual University. Its advocates believe that the Internet can be made use of to replace traditional higher schooling (Resnick). Admittedly, the Virtual University has advantages over its traditional counterpart: 1) class size is not limited by classroom space and 2) a course can be taken at “any time and any place”. However, in comparison with the Traditional University, it can not deliver extracurricular activities in an organized manner which are supposed to prepare graduates to live in the real world^{2,3}. Therefore, it might be better for them to restrict their enrolment to older learners who might not need to take part in these activities as much as younger students.

According to Professor Sue Martin of Grand Valley State University, professors have concerns about teaching online (Martin, 2001, 98). For example, student cribbing, is made easier. We also suspect that some faculty members are not sufficiently familiar with the technology of the Internet and are threatened by it. Moreover, Professor Martin

is of the opinion that alumni and traditional learners might be concerned that courses taken via the Internet are devaluing the degree they completed on campus.

As a matter of fact, there are other electronic networks besides the Internet that can be made use for the distribution of learning (cable TV, CD-Roms and WAP), which have made new teaching skills necessary (Yaklief, 2001, 129; Hallak, 2000, 32).

Concluding Remarks

The school ought to educate broadly when preparing learners for the workplace because we can not accurately predict what their needs will be owing to rapid advances in technology and (globalization) (<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kgoo0009.htm>).

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Notes

1. Professor Husén, has put forth an interesting theory as to why mandatory primary education took root in 19th century Europe (Husén, 1974, 10). According to him, parents began to work in factories, so the family could no longer operate as an educational institution. The task of educating children in the Christian Faith and teaching them how “to read and write” then had to be given to a separate institution thus ensuring that industry’s future labor force was appropriately educated. It should be noted that this approach to education does not value childhood for “its own sake”, but only as a preparation for adulthood (<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kgoo0009.htm>).

2. Resnick’s remarks refer to American colleges and universities, however, they are applicable to higher educational institutions in other countries.

3. It should be noted that part-time traditional university students have been part of the educational landscape for some time and they have only limited access to extracurricular activities.

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